

April 8, 2011

What happens in a government slowdown / shutdown?

Some people call it a government *shutdown*, but that isn't entirely accurate, so others call it a government *slowdown*. It's what happens when there is not legislation in place to fund the full operations of the government.

Between 1977 and 1996, federal appropriations have lapsed fifteen times. The most recent shutdown began in mid-December of 1995 and lasted twenty-one days, the longest time in modern history.

In the event of a funding lapse, the Office of Congressman Todd Akin will have severely reduced staffing levels. As a result of the reduction in staff, responses to inquiries and comments may not occur in a timely fashion. We are sorry for any inconvenience that may occur as a result.

When the government runs out of money, we all want to know how we will be affected. These are the FAQs. Select the line that best describes your position or question.

1. [What services will be affected?](#)
2. [What services will be unaffected?](#)
3. [I am a member of the Armed Forces.](#)
4. [I am a civilian government employee.](#)
5. [I am not a government employee, but my job depends on a government contract.](#)
6. [I am a senior citizen and I receive regular government services or benefits.](#)
7. [I am a tourist planning to visit Washington, DC.](#)

8. [I am a citizen who occasionally uses federal government services.](#)

For more detailed information, visit:

[US Office of Personnel Management – Information for Federal Employees](#)

[RSC Policy Brief on Shutdowns](#)

[Potential Effects of a Lapse of Appropriations on Executive Activities](#)

1. What services will be affected? During a shutdown, many activities that are deemed “non-essential” under federal law cease. During the last shutdown in 1995, the following activities were affected:

- All national parks, museums and monuments were closed.
 - New patients were not accepted into clinical trials at the National Institutes of Health.
 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suspended disease surveillance.
 - Work on bankruptcy cases was suspended.
 - Recruitment of federal law-enforcement officials was suspended.
 - Non-emergency / non-inpatient Veterans Affairs programs were affected.
 - Applications processing at the Bureau of Alcohol, tobacco and Firearms was delayed.
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- What services will be unaffected? Essential government services will be unaffected. Federal employees who have been designated as essential will report to work and will be paid for their work after the Congress appropriates money to fund their agencies. Examples of essential government services include:

- Deployed members of the military will defend America’s interests in posts worldwide.
 - Federal security officers continue their protection duties.
 - Congress meets to fulfill constitutional duties.
 - Border and coastal protection personnel work to keep our borders secure.
 - Federal courts hear cases and issue rulings.
 - The FBI and Department of Justice pursue criminal investigations.
 - The Treasury Department collects taxes and borrows funds as needed.
 - The Federal Reserve supports the money and banking systems.
 - The Department of State represents our nation’s interests with our allies and other foreign nations.
 - The CIA, NSA and other intelligence agencies gather intelligence.
 - Social Security, Medicare, and other mandatory benefit payments continue.
 - Veterans’ hospitals maintain care of inpatients and provide emergency care.
 - The air traffic control system is operational.
 - Federal prisons remain guarded. Prisoners are fed and their basic needs are cared for.
 - Federal emergency personnel respond to natural disasters.
 - Electrical power is produced and the power grid is maintained.
 - Any activity that has already been funded or received its funding outside of the appropriations process continues without interruption.
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1. I am a member of the Armed Forces. According to the House Committee on Armed Services, military personnel will serve without pay until funds are appropriated by Congress and signed into law by the President. Military personnel are not subject to furlough and active duty personnel will continue to report for duty. They will accrue pay for the days they work during the shutdown, however they will not receive pay until the pay period after an appropriations bill is signed into law.

- If there is a government shutdown at midnight on April 8th, service members will receive midmonth pay (on April 15th) for the eight days of April covered by the current continuing resolution (CR).

- If there is a 1 week extension of the current CR through April 15th, service members would receive their normal midmonth pay for the first 15 days of April.

- **I am a civilian government employee.** When the government runs out of money that has been appropriated by congress, government agencies are directed to distinguish between essential and non-essential employees. By law, "essential" employees are those necessary to maintain activities directly related to the protection of life and property. These employees must report to work or will be subject to the disciplinary procedures that are in place for their agency. Employees who are non-essential are furloughed. These employees are not allowed to work during the shutdown and are not allowed to take paid vacation time. Because every agencies contingency plan is kept private, it is unknown how many federal employees would be furloughed during a shutdown. Employees who are furloughed are not paid during the funding gap. In the past, furloughed employees have received back-pay after Congress appropriates funds for their agencies; however Congress is not obligated to do this.

- **I am not a government employee, but my job depends on a government contract.** Federal contractors cannot be paid if appropriations have not been enacted. Employees of some federal contractors may be furloughed without pay. During the last government shutdown, approximately 20% of government contracts were adversely affected by the funding lapse. Some contracting firms may ask employees to complete training programs, take vacations or temporarily reassign them to other projects.

- **I receive regular government services or benefits.** Most people receiving regular government services or benefits should not be immediately affected by a lapse in federal appropriations. Most programs are fully funded for current recipients for at least two months, which is longer than any shutdown in recent history. However, programs that are administered

directly by the federal government (vs. by the states) may not process new applications during the shutdown.

- *Social Security* – Social Security benefits would not be delayed, since these benefits are not subject to an appropriation. New enrollees in the program will not be processed until full government operations resume

- *Medicare* – There is a minimum two week lag time between when services are received and when payments are issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). If there is a funding lapse for more than two weeks, non-essential services could be impacted. It is possible that CMS could hold claims for future processing.

- *Student Aid* – Pell Grants are not likely to be affected by a government shutdown, since they are funded in advance. It is possible that FAFSA application processing would be suspended until funding is restored.

- *School Lunches* – This program is funded until May so there should be no disruption for students unless the shutdown lasts that long.

- *Food Stamps* – Recipients should receive no lapse in their benefits.

- *Welfare* – The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program should not be affected. This program is authorized for FY2011 and states have received federal funds to run this program through June 30th.

- *Unemployment Benefits* – Unemployment benefits should not be immediately affected. States have funds to pay benefits for the next two months and should have the administrative resources necessary to distribute benefits in the near term.

- *Disability* – Disability benefits should not be affected.

- *Medicaid / SCHIP* – Populations served by these programs should not be immediately affected. States have received funds to pay Medicaid and SCHIP benefits for the next two months. Providers and beneficiaries should not see a near term disruption in payments.

- *Veteran's Health Services* – The VA has received appropriations to operate its health care system for all of FY2011. Veterans' medical care should not be affected by a temporary lapse in government funding. Hospitals, clinics, Vet centers and homeless domiciliary would remain open. Administrative services for veterans may be temporarily disrupted.

- *Veteran's Disability / Survivor / Pension Benefits* – Disability compensation for veterans' survivor, education and pension benefits would not be disrupted; however no new claims would be processed until further appropriations are made by Congress.

1. **I am a tourist planning to visit Washington, DC.** ☐ Tourists may find that attractions they were planning to visit, such as museums, the National Zoo, and national parks, are closed during a government shutdown. The National Cherry Blossom parade, scheduled for Saturday, April 9th, would continue

as planned, with a slightly altered route. If you are a resident of the 2nd

District, you may stop by Congressman Akin's Washington, DC office for a packet of information on tourist attractions, such as private museums and attractions run by neighboring states, which will be open to visitors.

2. I am a citizen who occasionally uses federal government services. When agencies run out of money appropriated by Congress to fund their operations, most citizens will experience minimal disruption in their daily lives. Here's how some federal services might be affected:

- *Postal Service* – the mail would be delivered and post offices would be open for business. Since the USPS is not primarily funded through the appropriations process, its activities would not be significantly affected.
- *Indian Affairs* – Critical Services would continue, including law enforcement, most health services and resource protection. However, non-essential personnel may be furloughed and the services they provide may be temporarily unavailable. These services may processing include leasing applications, providing day care, Indian school operations, natural resource extraction operations, processing payments, and public works operations.
- *National Parks and Museums* – National parks and museums (such as the Smithsonian) would be closed to public use. Closures would include 394 national parks and sites such as the Statue of Liberty, Washington Monument, White House Visitor's Center and Yellowstone National Park. Permits for special activities, camping and special events would be rescinded. The National Park Service does not expect to limit access to open-entrance park land, such as the National Mall and the GW Parkway. The National Zoo and Smithsonian, as well as other federally funded museums would be closed to the public.
- *Travel* – Air traffic controllers and TSA screeners will be working as well as other transportation safety officials. During the last government shutdown, normal passport and visa processing was suspended; only emergency passports and visas were issued. Amtrak will continue to operate.
- *IRS* – According to the House Committee on Ways and Means, this would be the first time the IRS would be faced with a government shutdown during tax season. While a minimal level of staff would be present, it is possible that refunds and processing of tax returns would be delayed and audits may be suspended.
- *Housing* – The Federal Housing Administration would not have the authority to endorse / insure new loans. Lenders offering FHA loans may chose to go forward with the loan at closing, but they would have to assume the risk that FHA would normally take on. This would depend on the policies of the individual lender. Some home closings may disrupted by a temporary lapse in government funding. The National Flood Insurance Program would continue to pay claims and sell policies during a shutdown but responses to day-to-day inquiries may be curtailed due to limited staff availability. HUD programs may be eventually affected but there should be no immediate effect since these programs are administered by local authorities.

